Hamlets Disease

(c) July 2009 Jon M Taie
Watertown, MA

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

INT. CASTLE -- MORNING - TWO STAIRCASES ARE ON EITHER SIDE OF THE STAGE AND RUN UP AND OFF. A LARGE ORNATE DOOR IS CENTER. A CHANDELIER HANGS IN THE CENTER GIVING OFF A DIM GLOW WITH A WOODEN CHAIR UNDERNEATH. COBWEBS ARE PRESENT. THE COLORS RANGE FROM GREY TO SLIGHTLY LESS GREY. EXITS ARE ON EITHER SIDE OF THE BASE OF THE STAIRS AS WELL. WE CAN HEAR A SOFT RAIN AND LIGHT BIRD CHIRPS COMING FROM OUTSIDE. A PAUSE HAMLET ENTERS FROM ATOP THE STAGE RIGHT STAIR CASE AND PROCEEDS SLOWLY DOWN.

HAMLET
To be or not to be; now is the winter of our discontent; I have come to praise Caesar not bury him - no; toil toil boil and trouble; o Romeo, o Romeo where for art thou... oh, what is the use? I shall never have these memorized. Ophelia. Ophelia.

Hamlet sits in chair, downcast.

PAGE
(entering stage left with scroll)
M'Lord, I bring news. M'Lord? Are you crying?

Hamlet gestures to continue.

PAGE (CONT'D)
M'Lord, I bring news of great evil and intent. Your royal father has been murdered.
(pause)

HAMLET
Who?

PAGE
Your father, M'Lord.
(pause)
The king. The one with the biggest hat.

HAMLET
My father? But, which one?

PAGE
Your *real* father.

Hamlet begins a low moan which grows to a shout. Hamlet then stops and flings the chair down. He runs to the top of SR stair case and crouches.

HAMLET
My father! My father? It can not be.

PAGE
I have the scroll, M'Lord. It bears the seal of your house.

HAMLET
Give it here.

Page starts to ascend the stairs.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
STAY!

The Page isn't sure how to proceed.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
Servant, do you disobey your lord? I say again, give it here.

Page attempts to reach Hamlet but can not.

PAGE
But M'Lord. How can I? You are perched as the morning raven on the tipply-top.

Page fashions scroll into paper airplane and throws it Hamlet. It glides next to him.

HAMLET
Begone!

The Page starts to cross the stage to exit.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
Wait. No, go. Hold. Very well, out of my sight.

PAGE
(quietly)
M'Lord. I meant my King.
(bows)

Page exits.

HAMLET
Dear, dear father. If I refuse the opening of this ignoble document would it still be so? A simple act to seal your fate?
(starts to open scroll)
Ow, the document not only portends death but pretends it as well!
(MORE)

HAMLET (CONT'D)
You shall not draw the blood of a royal again.
(puts down scroll)
My father, my king, of what mischievous designs hast thou noble rule fallen?
(picks up scroll and starts to open it)
Ah. I see thy dark purpose as it stains my skin. You shall not, note, mark me by your vile acts!
(puts down scroll)
Ophelia. Ophelia.

Hamlet crosses and rights chair, sits. Page 2 enters with scroll from SR base of staircase and approaches Hamlet.

PAGE 2
M'Lord, I bring news of great import!

HAMLET
Have you not heard? I was just promoted by the fates. Now I am your king.

PAGE 2
Apologies sovereign.
(bows)
I bring news that may bring light to your mood. The king is not dead!

HAMLET
Say again. The king is not dead. My father yet lives?
(Stands and marches)
Let blare the trumpets! Let the canons sound! Long live the king! Long live the king!
(stops suddenly)
Boy, Which king?

PAGE 2
(reading scroll)
The other one.

HAMLET
NAY! It can not be! Hand it here.
(scan reads scroll)
I Claudius being of sound mind ... throne ... Denmark! Denmark!? Surely we are in Des Moines?

PAGE 2
I have not heard of such a place, my king.
(MORE)

PAGE 2 (CONT'D)

(pause)
M'Lord.

HAMLET
Nay. It matters not. Take heel!

Page 2 quickly exits.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
Could this be true? Am I usurped before my crown has even been fit? Surely, this is the work Banquo, friend and wily spirit, to assuage my melancholy humors.
(carefully checks scroll)
It appears valid. The wax still fresh on the royal seal. Shall I taste? It would stick in my throat. But, the unopened scroll bearing the hateful lettering of my true fathers death.
(retrieves first scroll)
Perhaps, if I do but combine these as lovers the traits of one shall imbue the other?
(crams scrolls together)
'Tis useless!
(throws them down)
Royal father slain and disloyal father gained. Surely two fathers is more than a son should bear. I should chase thee bear.
(draws rapier and chases invisible bear, trips and loses sword)
I am disarmed! Stay back. Stay back. I shall not be slain by furry figments of my overwrought imaginings!
(exits being chased by invisible bear)
Ophelia! Away!
(offstage)
Ophelia!

LIGHTS OUT:

SCENE TWO

INT. CASTLE -- LATER - TWO WOODEN CHAIRS SIT IN THE CENTER LIGHTLY DRAPED IN FABRIC OF THE ROYAL COLORS OF DENMARK UNDERNEATH THE CHANDELIER. HAMLET AND OPHELIA ENTER OPPOSITE. A MOMENT.

LIGHTS UP:

HAMLET
Ophelia!

OPHELIA
Ham!

They run to each other and embrace. Hamlet attempts to kiss Ophelia. Still embraced she turns away.

OPHELIA (CONT'D)
M'Lord. We are in the royal chambers.

HAMLET
But I must! The scent of perfume entangles as a bawdy ale!
(attempts another kiss Ophelia breaks the embrace)

OPHELIA
Nay my lord. You're in a sweat. The heat from thee is as hot as the vapors of hell.
(crosses to chairs)
You shall sully my frock.
(sits)
Come, sit and tarry with me awhile.

HAMLET
I shall come but tarry, I know not.

Hamlet crosses and tries to sit in/on Ophelias lap gives up and sits hard in the other chair.

OPHELIA
What mean you, M'lord?

HAMLET
Tarry? I know not. 'Tis but talk.

OPHELIA
You seem agitated of late.

HAMLET
Confidence flies from me and wraps my soul in the concrete confusion as are tortured spirits of Hades.

Ophelia starts to sew. She occasionally responds non verbally to Hamlet during the next sequence. Hamlet moves throughout.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
Likened to the penguin am I. Think you not? It is a bird, yet it can not fly. It has no feathers. It swims. You find that amusing? Darting to and fro in the murky deep. The weighty waters press against its bulk. Yet it is still a bird and flies in the depths. It searches in Poseidons playground never to reach the sky. It longs to reach the sun only to find it nothing more than a luminous soggy urchin of the sea. This is sometimes a paradox. By being what it is and is not it loses both. More unthinking it becomes, losing all rationale till it loses both. Losing the thing it desires most. The embracing warmth of the sun to burn out the old dark memories and imbue the penguin with understanding. They must speak the same language to convert the leaded mind to gilded gold.

OPHELIA
Surely, M'Lord, a bird and a star speak not the same language.

HAMLET
(cross to Ophelia)
They indeed can! Know you not? The language all things speak.
(Hamlet kisses Ophelia passionately who returns it)
Know you now.

OPHELIA
Such passion. 'Tis been a fortnight my lord. We're not so different as a star and a bird. Let us anon and find the kernel of our woes so we may burn them away and argue no more.

Ophelia stands and takes Hamlets hand and begins to exit. Hamlet breaks away

HAMLET
This thing we will do but first the purging of the royal brain and its old ghosts that haunt us must be done.
(MORE)

HAMLET (CONT'D)
Time apart is time together in heart and head. Stronger our love will be and both healed of our hurts.

OPHELIA
I count the hours, minutes and seconds, M'Lord. Take thy time to heal thy mind.

Ophelia exits.

HAMLET
My love. When next we meet I shall be what I should and cast off the old ragged garments that but weigh me down. Time for a change!

Page enters with scroll.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
(draws sword)
My good man, you bring good news?

PAGE
M'Lord I bring news of utmost urgency...

HAMLET
And great import? Have we been invaded by penguins? Give it.
(spears scroll)

PAGE
My lord, you joust!

HAMLET
Oh, I do but jest. Fear not. I bear a sword and it must be used but not on the low! 'Tis to costly to stain with the blood of any but the most high.
(reading scroll)
Happy days! Oh, night is here. Happy days to happy nights! Go.

PAGE
Yes, M'Lord. I am gladdened to see you in such spirits.

HAMLET
(Hamlet grabs Page and dances)
When all is possible the spirit is moved.
(MORE)

HAMLET (CONT'D)
And the spirits move us to change and laugh and replace our pain with pleasure! We shall drink deep of the spirit!

Page exits.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
Go! And on your return the waters will run clear!

Trumpet fanfare. Claudius enters.

CLAUDIUS
Our recent proclamations have you seen? Your countenance tells different. Your madness must it be to smile so. Lest your joy for the impending coronation outweigh the sorrow.
(sits)
Come. What say you?

HAMLET
My smile is because of the future.

CLAUDIUS
Then it must be my glorious ascent, that is the cause of thy beaming. Our past no longer troubles?

HAMLET
No, M'Lord. The past is only troubling to one who knows not the future.

CLAUDIUS
Pray prognosticate.

HAMLET
Shall I dance for you as well? For the now I must obey.

CLAUDIUS
Nay, tell us what you see?

HAMLET
I see us all who are alive, happy. The past wiped clean and two newly entwined. Two who sit on a single throne.

CLAUDIUS
Glad tidings, indeed. Your future is not far.

HAMLET
My future is fair. What say you to a spar?

CLAUDIUS
Spar? I am 10 years your senior, son.

HAMLET
True, true. But 10 times my strength.

CLAUDIUS
You do but flatter. We shall grant you this wish. But I have no weapon.

HAMLET
Here, take mine, may it serve you as well as your rule.
(Hamlet hands sword to Claudius)

CLAUDIUS
Where is yours?

HAMLET
The mind shall be mine, Noble Father. Though it may bind by madness once unbound, who knows?

CLAUDIUS
Take this bodkin, my son.

HAMLET
Yea, verily.

CLAUDIUS
We have no Seconds.

HAMLET
(under breath)
I may, My King.

They fight. Claudius scores a hit.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
Well played. The strike carries the weight of time and practice.

They fight. Claudius scores a hit.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
'Tis like fighting a bear! Continue?

CLAUDIUS
We fear you hide your strength from us. Come, show your metal!

HAMLET
As you command, My King.

They fight and work their way up the stairs.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
Though I am not your equal in combat there is more to battle than brawn!

CLAUDIUS
What say you?

HAMLET
Nothing more than strategy often bests strength.

They stop fighting.

CLAUDIUS
Praytell?

HAMLET
(suddenly panicked, kneels)
See you not? Look there! My father approaches.

CLAUDIUS
Your father is dead.

HAMLET
Nay! Nay! Behind the arras. Father! I love you. Leave no more!

CLAUDIUS
You act as a child.
(moving to arras)
No ghostly form resides here. Look nothing!

Claudius opens the arras to reveal the form of Hamlets father. Which slowly comes forward.

CLAUDIUS (CONT'D)
No. This cannot be. You are no more. Vile spirit. I am King here! Guards!

The ghost moves slowly towards Claudius until he is pushed off the back of the staircase. Hamlet is still cowering. Hamlet looks up. The ghost is standing over him and slowly removes the head dress and reveals Ophelia. Hamlet stands and they embrace and kiss while the lights slowly fade into color. A moment.

BLACK OUT: